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PETER THE GREAT:
LINKING MILITARY STRATEGY TO NATIONAL
OBJECTIVES IN IMPERIAL RUSSIA

by

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A Research Report Submitted to the Faculty

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Preface

A few years ago, the Army selected me to be a Eurasian Foreign Area Officer (FAO). My training will eventually lead to an assignment as a defense attaché or security assistance officer in one of the former Soviet republics. I, therefore, wanted to develop a solid background in Russian military history. Since Tsar Peter I, more commonly known as Peter the Great, is considered the most important military reformer in Imperial Russia, I decided to devote my paper to his military goals, reforms, and achievements.

Studying only military issues, however, does not fulfill the rest of my FAO tasking, which is to understand Russian strategic thinking. Analyzing how a battle is fought is useless unless there is a corresponding understanding of why it is fought. Since virtually all strategic military thinking and planning in every age is driven by a larger set of political goals, I felt it is necessary to consider Peter's foreign policy goals to ascertain to what objectives his military strategy was directed.

I must give special thanks to LTC Ronald Kennedy, my faculty research advisor and to Professors Donald Ostrowski and Uri Ra'anani. Professor Ostrowski, from the Harvard University history department, taught excellent Russian Imperial and Soviet history courses during my master's program, and I was privileged to work as a collator and analyst in Professor Ra'anani's Russian studies institute during my time at Boston University.

Abstract

Three of the major areas we focused on at ACSC have been leadership, the nature of war, and war theory. Through these subjects we have learned how to analyze and evaluate individual leaders, their policies, and how those leaders used their military forces to achieve political goals. I intend to apply this methodology to Tsar Peter I (The Great) of Russia.

From previous study, I learned that Peter I was something of a revolutionary leader -- one who pushed his society towards the modern West and away from the Orthodox Slav center and Asiatic East. I also know that he was successful in most of his pursuits. I intend, therefore, to analyze Peter's development as a leader, the formation of his foreign policy, and the way he used his military forces to achieve his goals. I believe that Peter's success was at least partly due to the fact that he was able to blend the instruments of power available to him and that his military adventures were not the product of a megalomaniacal desire for personal aggrandizement, but rather the by-product of a well calculated strategic plan

I will pay particular attention to the military and trace its development and transformation under Peter's leadership. This, of course, will require the analysis of at least a few campaigns and battles. I hope to determine to what extent Peter ensured congruency between his political agenda and the application of his military forces at the strategic and operational levels.

Chapter 1

Peter the Great

No tsar was more dynamic or energetic than that giant of rulers, Peter I.... He waged war almost constantly, gained Baltic territory, built St. Petersburg, made Russia a major European power, conquered Caspian territories from Persia, and dreamed of a still greater global role for Russia...

—Walter Moss
A History of Russia

In this concise statement, Walter Moss, a noted Russian historian, accurately sums up the reign of Tsar Peter I, more commonly known as Peter the Great, the fourth ruler of Russia's Romanov dynasty. Peter was an extraordinary leader who reformed Russia domestically and combined his diplomatic and military skills to propel his country to the forefront of European political stage. Even though his life was characterized by war, reform, turmoil, intrigue, defeat, and triumph, Peter remained focused on the goal he established in the first years of his reign; making Russia the master of the trade route between central Asia and central Europe. To achieve this goal, Peter developed and implemented a logical and sequential strategy to gain control of the Baltic Sea and ports on the Elbe River, prevent interference from the Tatars, keep the Ottoman Turks in check, and gain control of the Western Caspian.

Young Peter

Peter Alexeiovich Romanov was born on May 30, 1672 to Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich Romanov and his second wife, Natalia Naryshkina. Although Peter was probably not consciously thinking about Russia's global role or about how to reform the Russian government in his childhood, he was most certainly fascinated with the Russian army. As a boy, Peter ordered military uniforms and arms from the Russian Royal Ordinance and had a miniature fort built on the grounds of his residence so that he could study such things as defensive fortifications, interlocking fields of fire, and siege procedures. He also staged cavalry raids and practiced artillery gunnery on the grounds surrounding his palace.¹

As a young man, Peter did not exercise his right to immediately assume high rank in the Russian army. Instead, he served as a drummer in the Preobrazhenskii² Regiment, so named because it was garrisoned at his boyhood residence, the Preobrazhenskoe Palace. When this regiment outgrew the confines of the Preobrazhenskoe, Peter moved some of its soldiers to the nearby palace at Semenovskoe and formed a new regiment. These two units later served as the core units around which Peter built his new army.³

Peter spent many of his early years learning about and evaluating the capabilities of the Russian armed forces. By so doing, he gained a point of reference from which he would later direct the reforms he deemed necessary. It was also during his boyhood that Peter was introduced to foreign citizens, primarily Prussian officers, who lived in the German or foreign quarter not far from the Preobrazhenskoe Palace. These officers had a great influence on Peter's education and, therefore, on his character. They introduced him to regimentation, discipline, and order — qualities that he would display throughout his life and that he would force his army to emulate.



Figure 1. Tsar Peter I (The Great) of Russia (1672-1725).

In 1695, when Peter was 23 years old, he received his initial trial by fire at the first battle of Azov – a battle that will be discussed in detail later. Although not in command and officially still co-tsar with his brother, Ivan V (Tsar Alexei's son from his first marriage to Maria Miloslavshkaia), Peter influenced the action and assessed what his units did right and what they did wrong. Most importantly, his experience at Azov made Peter realize that to build an effective army, he would have to modernize his equipment and update his tactics. The pursuit of this goal is partly what led to his "Grand Tour" of West European capitals in 1697-98.

This tour was not exclusively devoted to military issues. While abroad, the tsar analyzed the way Western countries formed alliances and coalitions to further their foreign policy objectives. He learned these lessons well, as evidenced by the alliances he

later formed with Sweden and the German Princedoms— alliances that would have been simply unthinkable in pre-Petrine, Orthodox times. While visiting foreign capitals, Peter spent time studying shipbuilding, metallurgy, organizational dynamics, and political reform. By the time of the second *Streltsy* revolt in 1698, which forced the tsar to return to Moscow, Peter was ready to put all he had learned about discipline, military reform, technology, organization, and international affairs into practice.

Notes

¹ Christopher Duffy, *Russia's Military Way to the West: Origins and Nature of Russian Military Power 1700-1800* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 10; and B.H. Sumner, *Peter the Great and the Emergence of Russia* (New York: Collier Books, 1976), 28.

² A note on Russian transliteration and grammar. Russians decline their adjectives and attach gender to their nouns. When an adjective modifies a masculine gendered noun (i.e. regiment), an ending of “skii” is used. When the adjective modifies a neuter gendered noun (i.e. palace), an ending of “oe” is applied.

³ Walter G. Moss, *A History of Russia: Volume I to 1917* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997), 225-226.

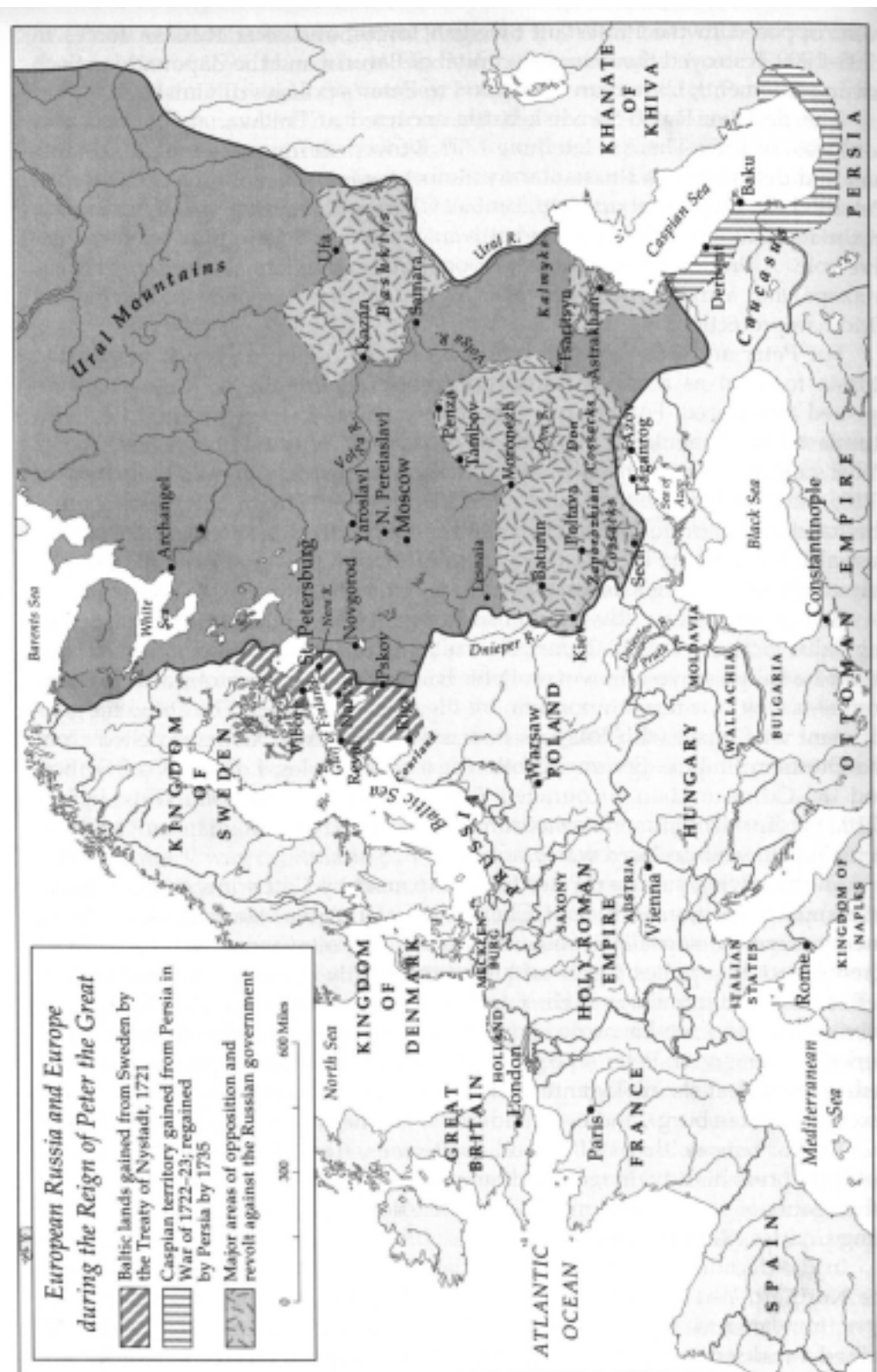


Figure 2. European Russia During Peter I's Reign

Chapter 2

Foreign Policy

Unfortunately for historians, Peter was not required to submit a written foreign policy outline or national military strategy to his Senate. Therefore, we are left to deduce his real intentions by analyzing what secondary documents are available and by looking at what he did rather than what he wrote. Some say Peter's foreign policy had European and Asian domination as its primary goal. Others believe he followed a policy void of menace — one that simply concentrated on building buffer areas to protect poor, beleaguered Russia from the evil land-grabbing Europeans and the subhuman Tatars.

A view reflecting the former is attributed to Orest Subtelny. While conducting research in the French *Ministère des Affaires Étrangères* in 1760, Subtelny came across a piece of Russian correspondence attributed to Peter titled the *Testament*. This document indicated an expansionist policy and contained both objectives and a strategy outlined below:

- Maintain the state in a system of continual war in order to harden the soldier and militarize the nation
- Expand by all possible means around the Baltic and Black Seas
- Encourage the jealousy of England, Denmark and Brandenburg against Sweden, and thus prepare Sweden for subjugation
- Encourage anarchy in Poland with the object of subjugating it
- Contract a close commercial alliance with the English, from whom Russian merchants and sailors can learn commercial and naval arts...
- Meddle at all cost, either by force or ruse, in the quarrels of Europe, and especially in those of Germany

- Maintain an alliance with Austria and engage her in ruinous wars to weaken her by degrees, meanwhile exciting against her the jealousy of the other princes of Germany
- Contract marriage alliances in Germany in order to gain influence there
- Use religious dissent to disrupt Poland and Turkey
- Prepare in secret ... to strike the great blow.... Begin by offering separately, very secretly and with the greatest circumspection, first to the court of Versailles, then to that of Vienna, to share with one of them the empire of the universe....This project cannot fail to flatter them and to kindle between them a fatal war that will soon become general, in view of the extensive alliances of those two rival courts, natural enemies, and the interest that all the other powers of Europe will necessarily take in this struggle
- In the midst of this great upheaval, Russia will be sought out...for help...and after having hesitated long enough to let them exhaust themselves and to assemble all her forces, she will decide finally for the house of Austria, and while advancing her troops to the Rhine, followed immediately by a swarm of Asiatic hordes... two large fleets will appear Azov and Archangel, bearing part of these same hordes.... and thus overrun Italy, Spain, and France, some of whose inhabitants they will massacre, some of whom they will enslave to re-people the deserts of Siberia... All these diversions will then give complete latitude to the regular troops to move in full force and with all possible assurance of conquering and subjugating the rest of Europe¹

The authenticity of this document can of course be questioned. It was, after all, found in France in 1760, a time of open confrontation between Moscow and Paris. The *Testament* does, however, contain suggestions that are remarkably congruent with the policies Peter actually implemented.

A more tempered interpretation of Peter's grand plan was put forth by E. M. Anisimov. He concluded that Peter's aim was to gain access to the Baltic and Black Seas.² According to Anisimov, Peter's strategic objective was to make Russia the transit route for commerce moving between Asia and Europe. Having a monopoly on the transfer of goods and commercial traffic from Persia and India to Europe (from the Caspian to the Baltic via Russian rivers and canals, then to central Europe via the Elbe) would immediately make Russia a major player in world affairs and fill its coffers with much needed revenue from transit fees.

Making money on the transfer of exotic and desired goods as opposed to growing, refining, and manufacturing substandard Russian products must have seemed like a great deal. But to make that dream a reality, Peter needed to wrest control of the Baltic Sea from Sweden and gain access to storage facilities on the coast near the Elbe River.³

Peter wanted to maintain control of the Black Sea for similar strategic reasons. Dominion over this area would facilitate trade with Southern Europe and provide year-round ice free ports where great ships and eventually fleets could be built. A strong Black Sea fleet would also help Russia offset the Ottoman Empire's power and help subdue Cossack and Crimean Tatar uprisings.

Although Peter surely wanted to control the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits, he realized that this goal was unreachable during the early years of his reign. Winning control of the straits would have required an attack on the very heart of the Ottoman Empire. Russia had been fighting the Ottomans for several years as a member of the Holy League with Austria, Poland, and Venice. The Peace of Karlowitz (1699), however, disbanded the Holy League and ended the fighting for all members of the League except Russia. Since the entire League was unable to defeat the Turks, Peter realized it would be impossible to do so on his own, especially in 1699.⁴

John LeDonne puts forward a similar geo-strategic view of Peter's foreign policy and adds another area of interest: the Western Caspian. LeDonne asserts that Russia had an expansionist policy and that the expansion was channeled into the drainage basins of the Baltic, the Black Sea, the internal Caspian and Aral seas, and the Pacific.⁵ He also concludes that Peter's interest in all these regions was motivated by trade. Just beyond

the Caspian lay the silk trade of Persia, the caravan trade of central Asia, and all the exotic products of India.⁶

LeDonne supports his thesis by pointing out that English traders had been traveling through Russia to reach Persia, central Asia, and China since 1533 and that by 1670, Persian merchants were doing business in Moscow.⁷ Rather than let England treat his country like a minor colony, LeDonne concludes that Peter acted to gain control of the trade routes by utilizing all his instruments of national power. In addition to his political and military moves, the tsar built canals from the Volga to the Neva rivers to link the Baltic and Caspian seas and, therefore, Petersburg with Astrakhan.

Policy Implementation

Peter's actual strategic objectives can be explained by combining Subtelny, Anisimov and LeDonne's views. From these views, an argument can be made that Peter's goal was to gain control of the Baltic ports and the Western Caspian to complete the transit route for Asian goods to Western Europe. A discussion of the steps he took to achieve these goals reveals that Peter crafted a logical and achievable policy and that he practiced it systematically and sequentially throughout his reign.

The Baltics

To begin operations in the North, Peter first had to extract himself from the fighting in the Black Sea on the best possible terms. As a member of the Holy League, Russia was obligated to maintain troops in this region for as long as the fighting lasted. Since the Peace of Karlowitz only bought Russia a two-year lull, not a full cessation of hostilities, Peter negotiated the Treaty of Constantinople (Istanbul) in 1700 to fully extricate himself from the Black Sea. Provisions of the treaty allowed him to keep the

port town of Azov and relieved him of the burden of keeping a large force near the Black Sea to secure Russian interests.⁸

Next, Peter took steps to gain access to the Baltic Sea and the Elbe River. He did this by building a political alliance against and then militarily defeating Sweden, the country that controlled the Northern Baltic ports. He also politically ingratiated himself with the Prussian princes who controlled the southern Baltic ports and the mouth of the Elbe.

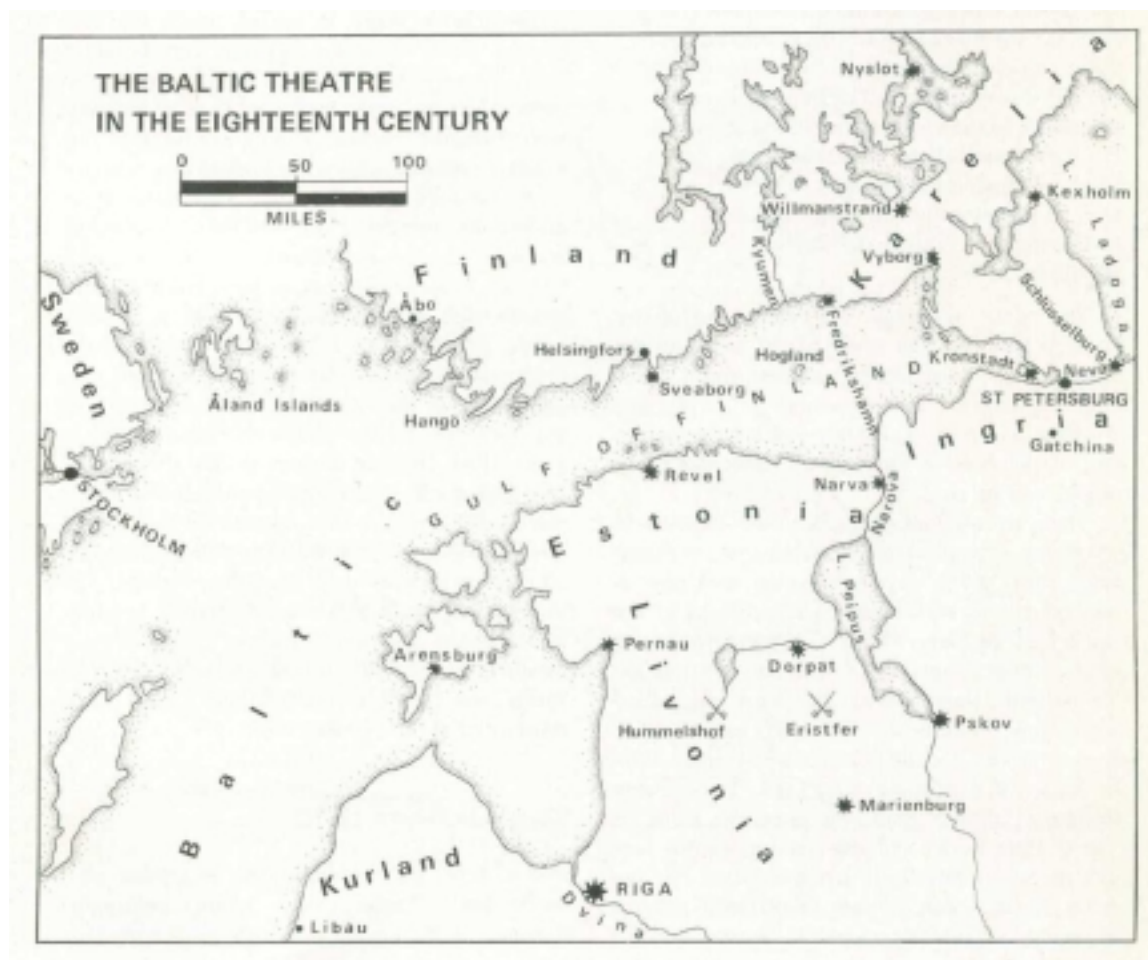


Figure 3. The Baltics in Peter's Time.

It is worthy to note that Peter did not simply charge headlong into a military campaign to achieve his objectives. Instead, he combined both the diplomatic and

martial skills he developed throughout his life, especially during his Grand Tour of Western Europe. Peter's strategy indicates his savvy, if not his genius, in conducting international affairs. I do not believe his policies were driven by megalomania or any other non-trade related goals.

Peter's first move against Sweden was to isolate the country by building an alliance against it — the Great Northern Alliance. His first partner was Augustus II who had recently assumed the throne of Poland (albeit with the help of 60,000 Russian troops).⁹ Peter also exploited the animosity of Sweden's other neighbors, all of whom resented the kingdom's slow but steady advance through the region. By 1700, Peter convinced Denmark, Prussia and Poland to commence the Great Northern War against Sweden.

By 1710, Russia had been largely successful in its Northern campaign and had troops garrisoned in all the Baltic States. At this point, Peter could have killed or tried to Russify the vanquished Baltic leaders. Instead, the Tsar demonstrated a measure of political savvy by letting the rulers keep their medieval privileges and granting them the right of self-government. He also allowed Livonia and Estonia to maintain freedom of religion.¹⁰ This serves to reinforce the idea that friendly, unchallenged access to the sea (and not the extension of the Russian masses from the North Sea to the Sea of Japan) was, at least initially, the real strategic goal for Peter.

Dominance in the northeastern Baltic was the first step, but to fulfill his grand plan, Peter had to get access to the year-round ice-free ports of Courland (also spelled Kurland) as well as to the Elbe River. He did this by wielding non-military tools. Instead of attacking with ships and cavalry, Peter used his nieces.

Since Courland belonged to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Russia's allies at the time, Peter could not simply take it by force. Instead, the Tsar arranged for the marriage of his niece, Anna Ivanovna (the future tsarina) to Duke Frederick William of Courland in 1710. The Duke was deeply in debt and Anna's dowry was used to pay off his mortgages. When the Frederick died one year later, Anna inherited a great deal of his lands.¹¹

After Duke Frederick William's death, Anna was courted by both Prussian and Polish gentlemen. Peter, however, withheld permission for her to remarry until he determined which country's help would be more beneficial should trouble erupt elsewhere in Europe.¹²

Peter pursued a similar strategy in 1716 with respect to Mecklenburg. He married off another niece, Catherine Ivanovna, to Mecklenburg's Duke Charles Leopold. Part of the marriage contract included Russia's right to use Mecklenburg's Baltic ports as military bases and depots in return for a promise of Russian help should the Duke be attacked by Sweden or by his domestic opponents. To back up the security aspects of the deal, Russia deployed a dozen infantry regiments to Mecklenburg and placed them under the Duke's command.¹³

By the time Sweden was defeated, the only area of the Baltic not under Russian control was the region around Jutland and Northern Denmark. Again, if Peter's real objective was gaining access to the Elbe and eastern parts of the Baltic Sea, conquering the western part would be of secondary significance. It was not, however, irrelevant. The tsar again played marriage politics to gain control.

The king of Holstein-Gottorp was anxious to reclaim the part of Schleswig he lost to the king of Denmark-Norway in 1713. As early as 1714 he proposed a marriage contract between Duke Charles Frederick of Holstein and the Tsar's daughter, Anna Petrovna. The contract called for Russian support against Denmark in return for the digging of a canal through Schleswig. Such a canal would have facilitated Russian for several reasons. First, a canal would have provided a more direct and ice-free route from ports on the Baltic Sea to the central European rivers. Second, a canal would have created a safer passage for Russian ships, allowing them to bypass the dangerous Jutland Strait, a waterway where many ships were lost due to bad weather. Third, Bypassing the Jutland Strait would also reduce shipping costs by cutting out the stiff transit fee levied by the Danes. Peter considered the offer but decided not to accept it for strategic reasons. The Tsar did not want to risk losing the support of the Danish fleet in his war against Sweden.

By 1720, the strategic situation changed. The Danish king had abandoned Russia and made a separate peace with Sweden. Additionally, the chances of Charles Frederick (Holstein) assuming the Swedish throne upon the death of King Charles XII were increasing because Charles XII had no children and Charles Frederick was a member of the king's extended family. Since Peter no longer needed to stay friendly with Denmark and since he saw the chance of gaining even greater influence in Sweden by having a daughter married to its king, he accepted a second proposal by Charles Frederick in 1721. Peter's new son-in-law was officially made the successor to the Swedish throne in 1723.¹⁴

Peter exploited his advantaged position when it came time to conclude the Northern War at Nystadt in September 1721. Negotiations had begun in December 1718, after Charles XII was killed, and continued through the time Peter's daughter married Charles Fredrick. Provisions of the treaty produced a Russo-Swedish friendship agreement, made Russia the guarantor of the Swedish regime, and prohibited Sweden from rebuilding the forces it lost in the war. It also consolidated and legitimized Russia's hold on Latvia and Ingria —overruling Peter's earlier promise to give these areas back to Augustus II of Poland. Russia also maintained control over Estonia and the ports of Riga and Viborg as well as Lake Lagoda, thus increasing the size of the buffer zone around Petersburg.

The tsar gave back the land conquered from Finland, especially ports that remained covered in ice for the better part of the year. These were of no use in Peter's grand plan because they did not facilitate trade. In short, the treaty of Nystadt guaranteed for Russia dominion in the Baltic, increased the security of Petersburg, fully integrated Russia into the European State system, and guaranteed control of a trade route from central Asia to central Europe.¹⁵

The Caspian

Peter's strategy in the Caspian against Persia was similar to the one he used against Sweden. At first, the tsar tried to play the Turks off against the Persians in order to prevent them from forming an alliance that would have consolidated their power in the Transcaucasus.¹⁶ LeDonne tells how Georgian and Armenian leaders asked for Russian help in rolling back Persian advances from the east. As early as June 1701, an Armenian merchant submitted a plan to the Tsar calling for the liberation of his country and

Georgia from Persian rule. Peter, still recovering from the battle of Narva, was unable to help at that time, but he kept communication with area leaders open.

In 1714, Peter sent an envoy, Artemii Volynsky, to be Russia's permanent representative in Persia. He tasked Volynsky to conclude a commercial treaty, evaluate the size and strength of local military forces, and discover if there was a water link from Persia to India. By July 1717, Volynsky signed an agreement that gave Russian merchants the right to trade freely in Persia and buy as much silk as they wanted. The Shah, however, did not want a permanent Russian representative and sent Volynsky back to Petersburg later that year.

When Volynsky next saw the Tsar, he pushed for an all-out military and commercial offensive against Persia, the goal of which was the annexation of its northern provinces (the center of silk production). Annexation would effectively make the Caspian a Russian lake and would put Peter in an ideal position to open a southern trade route to India.¹⁷ The tsar was so impressed by these proposals that he made Volynsky governor of Astrakhan, the province on the North-West Caspian shore, in the spring of 1719 and granted him full military and commercial powers.

The Transcaucasus was much like Europe during this time; courts fought among themselves and neighbors fought constantly over strategic locations. Peter, through Volynsky, was able to exploit these feuds just as he did in Western Europe. In exchange for a promise to help defeat rival members of his own court, the Georgian Tsar invited Peter to station Russian forces in his country. This enabled Peter to build bases in Derbent, Shemakha, and on the Terek River.

In 1720, Persia attacked Shemakha and 300 Russian merchants were killed. This was the excuse Peter needed to begin a fight with the Persian Shah. Peter arranged for Cossack, Kalmyk and Tatar help (all of whom would benefit from a weakened Persia) and began a campaign in May 1722. The military activity was uneventful, but in the end Peter was able to conclude two treaties. The first, with Tahmasp in September 1723, ceded to Russia "forever" Derbent and Baku as well as three other provinces on the Caspian for use as supply bases. The second, the Russo-Ottoman Treaty of June 1724, solidified the partition of the Persian Empire and consolidated Russia's gains on the Caspian coast.¹⁸ Peter's grand strategy of controlling the trade routes from India to central Europe was now complete.

Notes

¹ Hugh Ragsdale, ed., *Imperial Russian Foreign Policy* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Cambridge University Press, 1993), 76.

² Ibid., 21.

³ Fully discussed by Hans Bagger in "Role of the Baltic in Russian Foreign Policy" in Ragsdale, 40-44.

⁴ Ragsdale, 24.

⁵ John P. LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World, 1700-1917: The Geopolitics of Expansion and Containment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 19.

⁶ Ragsdale, 94.

⁷ LeDonne, 12-18.

⁸ Ragsdale, 23.

⁹ Ibid., 24.

¹⁰ Ibid., 42.

¹¹ Ibid. and Robert K. Massie, *Peter the Great, His Life and World* (New York: Ballantine, 1980), 521.

¹² Ibid., 43.

¹³ Ibid., 45 and Sumner, 70.

¹⁴ Fully discussed in Ragsdale, 46-47.

¹⁵ Ragsdale, 25-26, 36, 46, and William Marshall, *Peter the Great* (London: Longman, 1996), 107-108.

¹⁶ LeDonne, 92.

¹⁷ Ibid., 94.

¹⁸ This entire strategy is fully discussed in LeDonne on pages 89-96.

Chapter 3

The Military Dimension

The larger strategic context of Peter's foreign policy and the details of his political maneuvering were only part of the reason for his enormous success. How the Tsar used his military to achieve by force what he could not attain by diplomacy alone completes the picture and provides an excellent example of how Peter combined the political, economic, and military tools at his disposal to execute his foreign policy. This chapter traces the progress of Peter's military reforms and review a few of his most important battles.

Azov

Azov is a logical starting point because this campaign illustrates the capabilities of the Russian armed forces in the last few years of the seventeenth century. During the reign of Alexei, Peter's father, the southern regions of Russian influence were anything but pacified. In 1669, peasant uprisings culminated in a revolt led by Stenka Razin, a Don Cossack. It was during this time that most of the Caspian basin was controlled by Ottomans and Cossacks, groups directly opposed to Moscow's dictates and who plundered Russian shipping on both sea and rivers. Obviously, this posed a threat to Russia becoming the guarantor of trade between Asia and Europe. The Russian nobility decided military action was required to subdue the region.

From 1676 to 1681, Alexei fought a war against the Ottoman Turks for control of the Black Sea and lands to its north. Most of the action occurred south of Kiev and on right side of the Dnieper river — regions dominated by the Cossacks. Russia was not able to achieve its military objectives because of logistics problems (it could not secure sufficient provisions) and because its forces could not move fast enough to overcome the Ottoman's delaying tactics.¹ Vasili Golitsyn, Alexei's representative to Constantinople, negotiated a truce (not a peace) that did not reduce Tatar military capability and, therefore, they maintained the ability to raid Russian territory.²

In 1695, Peter sensed an opportunity to renew the fighting in the South. Poland and Austria were still battling the Ottomans at this point and pressured Moscow to re-engage. Many Russians despised the Turks because of their constant raiding and also detested the notion of Moslems ruling Orthodox Christians. Peter, however, decided to get involved for more strategic reasons — he feared gaining less land and fewer ports on the Black Sea than his allies if and when a formal peace treaty was signed.³

The main Russian military campaign objective was the fortress near Azov. Azov was a port town located at the mouth of the Don River that provided strategic advantage to the force occupying it. The fortress commanded the main river flowing into the Sea of Azov and, therefore, the main waterway into the eastern Black Sea. Controlling Azov would allow Peter to threaten the Crimean Tatars by denying them their main east-west transit route. Control would also secure for Russia a base for further moves into the Black Sea and the Caucasus.⁴

In July 1695, Peter sent 120,000 troops down the Don and another 30,000 down the Volga. Both units converged at Azov and attacked on 5 August. Unfortunately for Peter,

the advance faltered, was pushed back, and by the end of the day, 1,500 Russians were killed. Peter mounted another offensive in September and was again badly beaten. Deciding that further attacks were useless, he turned his army around and started the long trip home.⁵

The defeat at Azov taught Peter some significant lessons. First, he learned that Russian engineers were sorely lacking in technical and tactical skills. They were unable to breach the Turk's defensive fortifications and did a poor job building their own. The Tsar also noted that the Ottomans exploited their command of the sea by rushing in seaborne reinforcements. Russia had no warships to counter the Ottoman's fleet and Peter simply could not overcome his enemy's ability to continually resupply the fort.

After the battle, Peter immediately went to work drafting more men from the region north of Azov and also setting up port and shipbuilding facilities at Voronezh. This town was much further up the Don, but it was in an area with excellent lumber and out of the reach of raiding parties. Peter also sent emissaries to Prussia and Austria in order to find Western-educated engineers who could both construct better defensive positions and penetrate those of the enemy.⁶

Peter decided in July 1696 that both his reconstituted land and newly built naval forces were ready and he launched a new offensive. This time, his investment in Western engineers and new ships paid off. His small fleet was able to prevent Ottoman reinforcement from the sea and his foreign engineers were able to breach the Azov fortress. Russia troops captured the fortress, occupied the town, and handed the 24 year-old Peter his first military victory.

Not content with his success, and showing a high level of strategic thinking, Peter immediately established a new town on the northern side of the Sea of Azov called Taganrog. This is where he began building his materiel base by setting up a new shipbuilding facility. Peter also showed how he intended to finance his new fighting units — he forced the local landowners to pay for his military projects.

After the first battle of Azov, Peter concluded that no branch of the Russian military was particularly effective. By the second battle of Azov, he learned that Western engineers could help him significantly and that his infant navy could work effectively in the small inlet of the Sea of Azov. At neither battle, however, did he test his infantry, cavalry, or artillery fully. With all this in mind, and after fully consolidating his rule in 1696, Peter left for his Grand Tour of West European capitals in 1697.

As was already discussed, Peter secured loans and forged alliances during this trip. He went to England and Holland to personally learn shipbuilding techniques. He was so impressed by the technology he saw that he arranged for Russian shipbuilders to be sent abroad to learn from their Western counterparts. He also arranged for foreign shipbuilders to come to Russia. The Tsar gained permission for over 250 of his naval officers to be sent to western schools where they learned navigation and gunnery. He even recruited 750 men, mostly Dutch, to serve in the Russian armed forces.⁷

***Streltsy* Revolt**

Peter's naval expansion began after the first battle of Azov. His next mission was to begin restructuring his land forces. The *Streltsy* revolt of 1698 gave him the chance. As far as Peter was concerned, the *Streltsy*, his primary infantry force, represented the political and social order of old Moscow — the order he was determined to crush.⁸ He

also considered the *Streltsy* a symbol of all that was wrong with the Muscovy armed forces. Peter came to that conclusion when, in 1694, he pitted six *Streltsy* regiments against his two new Guards regiments (Preobrazhenskii and Semenovskii) in mock combat. The numerically superior *Streltsy* were ordered to defend against an attack of the Guards, but were routed by Peter's "boy regiments."⁹

Peter believed the *Streltsy* officers were untrained and more concerned with their commercial concerns than with their military duties. *Streltsy* officers were appointed and promoted based on their family's position in the noble order, not because of their courage, demonstrated abilities, or technical and tactical competency. The rank and file were ill disciplined and spent more time in their barracks than out training. Peter felt that the *Streltsy* were used more often by competing families to gain tactical advantage in the court rather than for gaining strategic advantages on the battlefield.¹⁰ Above all, as Marshall indicates, Peter despised them because they were a "brake on reform," both social and military.¹¹

When the *Streltsy* revolted for the second time in 1698, Peter emasculated them. While personally supervising the executions of several hundred members, he disbanded four regiments and sent the remaining sixteen far-and-wide to rot.¹² In so doing, the Tsar not only cleared the way for a new, more professional army, he struck the death knell for the ideas and procedures of old Muscovy.

Peter next started restructuring his ground forces around the Preobrazhenskii and Semenovskii Regiments, also known as the Imperial Guards or simply Guards Regiments. These units were led by mostly foreign officers, some of the same men who tutored Peter as a young boy.

The Tsar decided that both volunteers and conscripts would fill the ranks of the new army. On 8 November 1699, Peter issued a notice for voluntary service. A similar order was issued nine days later, but this *ukaz* (order) did not request volunteers — it established the basis for conscription. Landowners were required to provide one foot soldier for each group of 50 peasant households and one cavalryman for each group of 100. Gentry in the civil service, widows, and retired men were ordered to provide one soldier for every 30 peasant households, and the clergy's requirement was one for every 25 households. These new soldiers would serve for life.¹³

By 1700, 10,000 men had volunteered and a total of 32,000 took up arms. Peter's first plan to reorganize the army included the addition of twenty-seven "soldier regiments" of infantry and two of dragoons to complement the Guards. The new regiments each contained 1,100 men were organized using a combination of Guards and West European models.

Now that the army was raised, it needed a doctrine to train and fight by. The regulations Peter and his generals came up with were based on the written guidance of Adam Adamovich Weide, a Russian born in Moscow of German parents who spent time abroad observing military developments. Weide's instructions, written in 1698, were drawn from Austrian models and discussed only the basics of organization and training. They did not address the responsibilities of officers at higher than brigade level.

Realizing that a strong army alone would not guarantee success, Peter forged ahead with his maritime construction projects. He continued collecting taxes from landowners and even the church to expand his operation at Voronezh. As more and more Italian and Dutch naval architects were brought in, shipbuilding expanded to include frigates,

galleys, and transports. Peter even set up a ministerial-level department for his navy — the first Russian admiralty. To outfit his warships, Peter bought 300 guns (ironically, from Sweden). By the end of 1699, the Russian Navy consisted of 14 warships with one 46-gun frigate.¹⁴

Not everyone, however, was interested in supporting Peter's new fleet. Many locals around Voronezh deserted and failed to pay taxes. Harsh working conditions contributed to the rampant disease and sickness that ran through port towns. Peter's reforms came with a high price and seeded resentment that would later hinder his strategic goals.

Great Northern War

By the time Peter signed the Treaty of Constantinople in 1700, he had achieved all his strategic goals in the Southwest. He kept Azov and Taganrog as well as the fortresses on lower Dnieper River. The treaty also assured Russian access to, and free navigation of, the Black Sea. Peter was successful in cutting the Crimean Tatar's lines of communication with the West and also in positioning himself to influence the Zaparozhian Cossacks who, if left alone, could rise up in rebellion against Moscow.

Peter was now ready to fulfill his greater strategic objective — access to the Baltic. Since diplomacy alone did not secure free access to the Baltic Sea, Peter decided to turn his new army north and initiated the Great Northern War. According to Anisimov, the original objectives of the war were very modest: to recapture Novgorod and assist Augustus II of Poland capture Livonia and Ingria.¹⁵ It was only after the victory at Poltava in 1709 that Peter's ambitions grew from simply supporting a friendly king to outright military domination of the northern Baltic coast. Within three years of his

victory at Poltava, Peter secured Livonia, Estonia, Ingria, and parts of Finland, and overran Poland.

Sweden was the logical target of Russia's aggression. Not only did Stockholm control much of the Baltic coast, it had also been the enemy of Novgorod and Moscow since it joined Poland to defeat Ivan the Terrible's Baltic Campaign (1558-81). Sweden also defeated Tsar Alexei when he tried to regain the lands lost by Ivan. The defeats exacerbated Russian distrust and hatred of Sweden and Peter exploited these feelings to build domestic support for the war in his court and among the Russian Nobility. Peter also believed Sweden was vulnerable because its new king, Charles XII, was only 18 years old in 1700.

Peter found friends for his fight with Sweden. The new Polish king, Augustus II (also ruler of Saxony) wanted greater influence in the Baltic region. By mid-1700, Peter convinced Poland, Denmark and Saxony to declare war on Sweden.

Although Peter was in the process of revamping his forces when the war began, his reforms had not gone as far as he had hoped. Over two-thirds of the men in the ground forces came from levies imposed on landowners and churches, levies that provided only domestic and monastery serfs. The Tsar wanted to spare the working peasantry so that they could stay in the fields, even though their robustness and strength certainly would have made them better soldiers than their domestic counterparts.¹⁶ Peter's regiments were still usually commanded by foreign officers (only around 100 Moscow gentry had been recruited to fill the officer ranks) who followed Weide's rules for organization, but aside from that were free to train and maneuver as they wished.

When Peter finally got into the fight, things started badly and got worse quickly. As soon as Russia declared war on Sweden, Denmark gave up. In the first test of the new Russian Army at Narva, Peter's troops were routed by a much smaller Swedish force.

Narva

The first battle of the war occurred on 19 November 1700 at the fortress of Narva. This strategic port city sat on the border between Estonia and Ingria on the River Norova, just a few miles from the Gulf of Finland. Peter massed 40,000 men in a horseshoe formation around the Swedish fort, anchored each flank to the river, and dug in for a siege. Unfortunately for the Russians, Charles XII landed a force of 11,000 to the west and moved it rapidly overland to relieve the fortress.

Without stopping to set a camp for themselves, the Swedes marched in perfect formation and attacked two points in the Russian line. The advance was so quick the Russian artillerymen were not able to set their guns or bring any effective fire on the advancing columns. The defensive entrenchment did not slow the attack and the Russian lines broke almost immediately. As a blizzard raged, the old-fashioned, noble-led, Russian cavalry holding the left or southern flank fled and the entire line became unhinged. Under stress, the new "soldier regiments" of infantry acted like "undisciplined militia," and the foreign officers competent enough to react correctly were unable to control their forces. The Swedes simply rolled up the flank and destroyed the Russian regiments piecemeal. Only the two Guards regiments, those holding the right or northern flank, showed any discipline that day.¹⁷

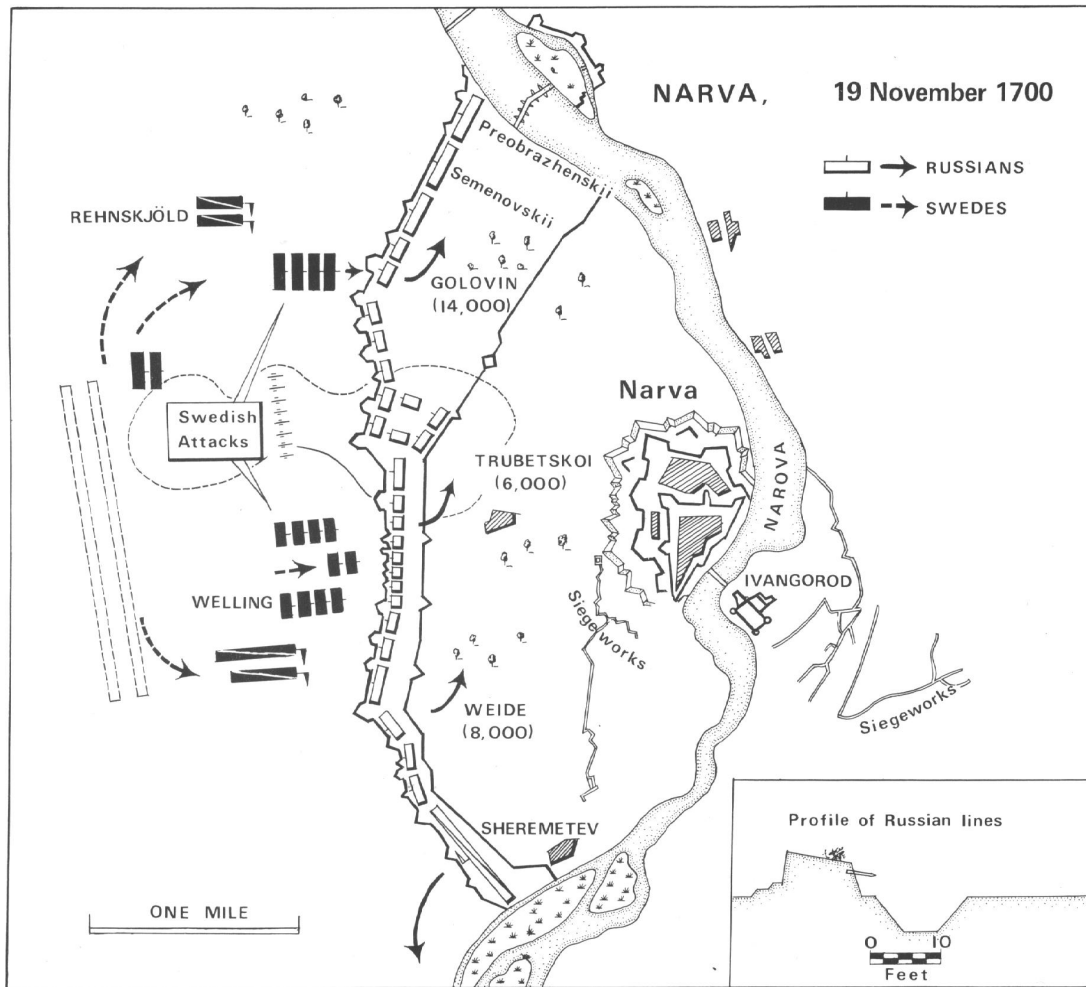


Figure 4. The Battle of Narva

When the day was over, more than 8,000 Russians were killed or wounded and all 145 cannons and thirty-two Russian mortars were lost. In their haste to escape, most of the cavalry on the northern flank rode simultaneously across the Kamperholm Bridge, causing it to collapse and drowning a majority of the horses. The cavalry to the south ran also and suffered a similar fate, but since there was no bridge for them to cross, they simply rode directly into the river. By the end of the day, many Russian officers were captured, including Weide, the author of the new organizational manuals. Peter had left the area only eight hours before the attack and survived to fight another day.¹⁸

When the fiasco was over, Peter relearned one lesson. The lack of a navy prevented him from stopping enemy reinforcements from reaching the battle. His fleet in the Black Sea was not brought north and could, therefore, not influence the action. Peter also concluded that his ground force reorganization would not ensure discipline or victory. He needed a professional, standing army that could be trained and equipped in the most modern fashion if he ever wanted to win a ground campaign. Another lesson was that he had no way to control any unit larger than a regiment. This meant that one regiment could not support or exploit the success of another. Similarly, neither the artillery nor the cavalry could be employed to support the infantry.

Luckily for Peter, Charles XII did not exploit his success at Narva and instead turned to fight Augustus II in Poland where he got bogged down for most of the next six years. Peter was granted a reprieve and, to his credit, he made good use of the time. The Tsar immediately went to work conscripting new soldiers by issuing levy after levy on peasants and townsfolk alike. From now on, one peasant from every 20 households would be required to serve for 25 years. No more would Peter rely on only domestic and monastery serfs. By 1705, the Russian army's ranks swelled to 200,000 soldiers.¹⁹

The tsar continued to require compulsory service from landowners and still relied heavily on foreign officers, mostly German, to command his regiments. In an effort to attract even more foreign officers, he issued a proclamation in 1702 opening Russia to the West. The deal included free passage, employment, religious toleration, and special law courts. Foreign officers would also be paid more than their Russian counterparts.²⁰

Peter realized after Narva that he had to revamp his training, update his equipment, and figure out a way to control all his regiments at once. Training to this point had been

based on Austrian, French, and Swedish models. The only infantry manual published in Russian was dated 1647 and even that was based on a German manual of 1615. Foreign officers had been training their troops as they pleased before Narva and many were using tactics based on the experience of the Thirty Years' War, where match-lit muskets, pikeman, line formations and siege guns ruled the day. These tactics, however, were ineffective against troops using flintlocks, bayonets, and improved, lighter artillery.

During his Grand Tour, Peter bought between 30,000 and 40,000 flintlocks and bayonets in England and then ordered the start of home production. By 1706, Russia was producing 30,000 flintlocks per year and by 1711 the output was up to 40,000. Until these new weapons could be incorporated, Peter bridged the gap by ordering musket drill and fire control procedures be completely revamped. There was even an innovation; Western armies usually used the bayonet for defense, but Peter devised a way to use it in the attack. In this way, the tradition of Russian "cold steel" was born.

Since all the Russian artillery was lost at Narva, Peter had to set about rebuilding his entire regiment. Russia could hope to get neither new cannons nor iron ore from its allies because Sweden was blockading the port of Archangel and controlling the Baltic Sea. To overcome this shortfall, Peter melted down the bells of local churches and cast the molten metal into gun tubes and carriages. By the end of 1701, Peter was able to send 243 cannons, thirteen howitzers, and twelve mortars to the field.²¹

To solve the problem of training his gunners, Peter turned to a Scotsman named James Bruce. Bruce worked to improve the technical quality of the cannons through his knowledge of metallurgy while at the same time teaching his artillerymen the basics of

gunnery and tactical employment. He revamped cannon crew drill and was the father of the new Russian artillery regiment.

The tsar also enlisted the help of Andrei Vinus, a Russian-born Dutchman, who knew how to build and run iron works and powder mills as well as cloth mills and sail-works. Vinus expanded the domestic production of weapons, ammunition, and sails.

The feudal cavalry was still considered the Tsar's weakest force and was the laughing stock of European horsemen. The fact that they were the first to break at Narva, even though they were not being attacked directly, only served to reinforced this image. Prince Boris Golitsyn was put in charge of reforming the heavy cavalry and he did so by forming dragoon regiments. He also adopted a new tactic — from then on, cavalry troops were trained to attack only with their swords and not to fire their weapons until the enemy lines were broken.²² This innovation shows that Golitsyn was trying to turn his cavalry into a shock force, not a standoff harassment force. This new tactic eventually paid off during the Poltava battles.

To more closely mirror the organization of Western armies, Peter reconfigured the size and composition of his entire army. In 1705, he increased the size of the infantry regiments from 1,100 to 1,400 soldiers (two battalions in each regiment). He also added more dragoons (light cavalry who were expected to fight with equal aplomb on horseback or on foot). Dragoon regiments consisted of six squadrons with two companies each. Peter's new army was to stand-to with two Guards regiments, forty two infantry regiments, five regiments of elite grenadiers, thirty-three dragoons regiments, and one regiment each of artillery and engineers.²³

The Tsar did not stop fighting completely after Narva. Instead, between 1701 and 1704, he ordered his navy to conduct small amphibious operations from Lake Lagoda and the Neva river. Peter used these operations to evaluate the combat worthiness of his still-growing maritime forces. Rather than mounting large-scale attacks, Peter called for limited operations against small Swedish detachments. This was Peter's way of seasoning his navy. The Tsar's confidence increased steadily as his units performed admirably in larger and larger assaults. In 1703, the Russian Navy mounted its largest operation and captured the mouth of the Neva River.

After Charles XII turned his main force against Poland, Peter realized the criticality of keeping Augustus II in the field. The Tsar needed time to let his reforms take hold and to let the rise of heavy industry in the Urals pay dividends (between 1701 and 1704, seven ironworks had been built there). To stave off the defeat of the Polish king, Peter sent him some troops.

But Augustus could not hold out forever. By late 1706, he was defeated and Charles found a new friend in the Ukrainian hetman (leader), Mazepa. After defeating Augustus, Charles turned east and Peter fought a delaying action, using a scorched earth policy back into present-day Belarusian territory. Cossacks loyal to Mazepa joined Charles' forces, as did the Baltic army of General Lowenhaupt. Charles pressured the withdrawing Russians, his objective: Moscow.

Russian Generals Menshikov and Sheremetev tangled with Charles at Holovzen on July 3, 1708. As at Narva, the Russian army of 38,000 was defeated when, after some units ran out of ammunition, they broke or continued to fight private battles. No one arm supported another. After the fight, Peter wrote "The Rules of Combat" that outlined the

duties of senior (above regimental) officers. The rules told generals how to move groups of regiments (now called brigades) and ordered them to ensure mutual support between branches of the force.²⁴

Russian leaders' adherence and utilization of Peter's new rules paid dividends one month later at the Battle of Mogilev. Peter engaged Charles XII and Mazepa in a four-day battle after they crossed the Dnieper River in August 1708. This time, the Russian army did not break. Generals were able to exploit the combined effects of cavalry and artillery and had some success maneuvering entire brigades. Although the battle eventually went to Charles, Mogilev showed that Peter's reforms were beginning to take effect.²⁵ The stage was almost set for the next major engagement of the war.

Poltava

Peter's scorched earth tactics were slowing his enemy's advance and by now the Swedish king was critically short on supplies. Only 60 miles short of Smolensk, Charles had to decide whether to wait for Lowenhaupt's army coming from the north or to look for provisions on his own. Lowenhaupt was traveling from Riga with 11,000 troops and enough supplies for both armies.

Mazepa promised Charles that if he turned south into Ukraine, forage would be plentiful and the Cossacks and Ukrainians who had just abandoned Peter would become his willing allies. Charles decided to accept the promise and turned south in search of provisions. This took him off a direct route to Moscow and widened the gap between himself and Lowenhaupt.

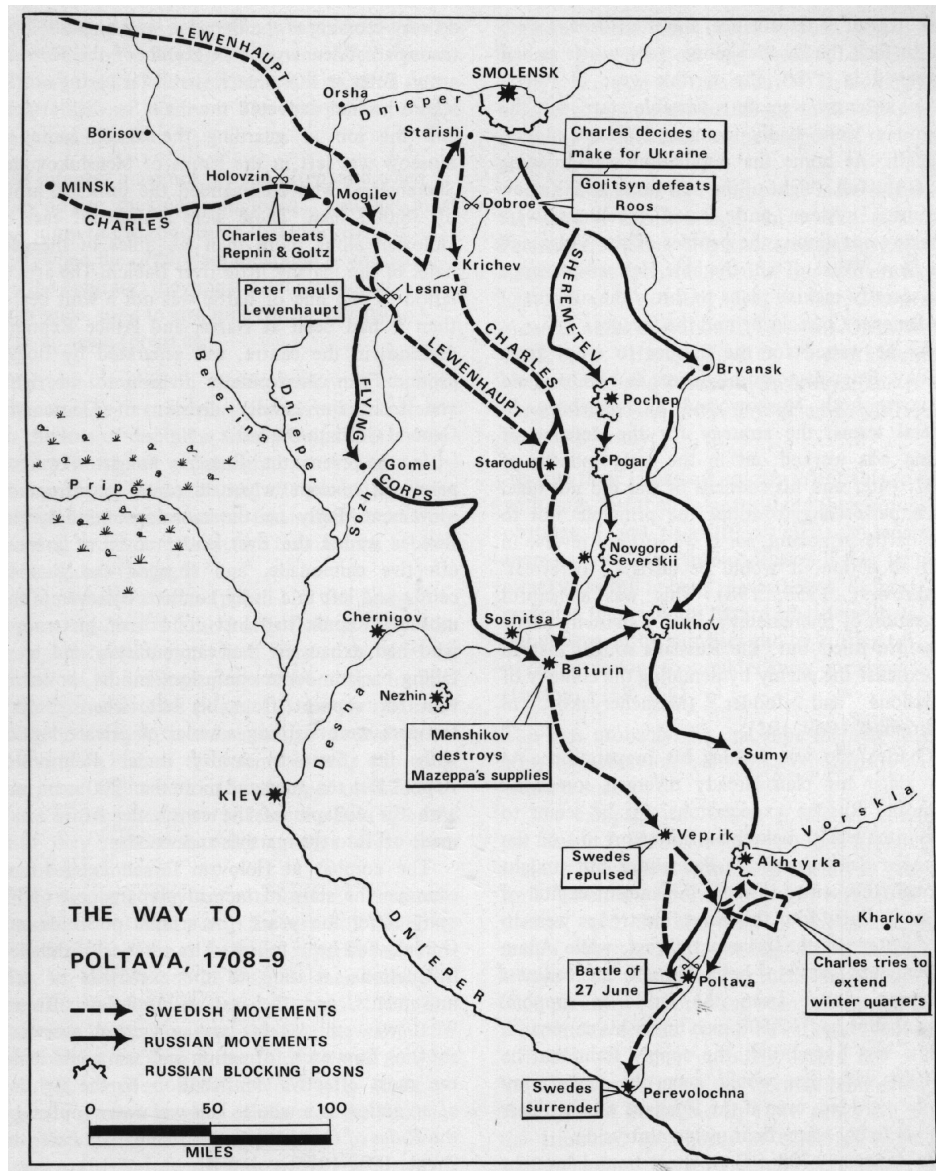


Figure 5. The Poltava Campaign

Charles had reason to believe his Ukrainian advisor. Peter's policies had been slowly alienating the people of the lower Don. In 1705-6 there was a small uprising against Russian rule near Astrakhan. By 1707, the entire steppe erupted in a revolt fueled by the horrid working conditions and extortion of the landowners around the Taganrog and Azov shipyards. The fact that Peter was also rounding up runaways and deserters who had fled to the Don only exacerbated the situation.²⁶ Since Mazepa was a Ukrainian

Cossack, and since turning south would take him directly into the area of revolt against Russia, it was logical for Charles to assume the army of Peter's enemy would be welcomed.

Unfortunately for Charles, this was not the case. It seems the Cossacks did not like anyone, adversaries of the Tsar or not, taking their provisions. The Swedish king was unable to get any help from the Turks or the Crimean Tatars. When the Ukrainians decided Charles' extractions were too severe, they started a guerrilla war against him, forcing him to move further south to Poltava and its store houses and food reserves.

Another bit of bad luck befell Charles XII on 9 October 1708. Russian forces operating as a *corps volant* (separate, fast moving raiding/shock force) under Menshikov caught Lowenhaupt's 12,500 man army by surprise at Lesnaya. Charles' main force was too far away to support the Baltic army and Menshikov's ten dragoon and three infantry regiments (11,500 men 30 guns) supported by 4000 heavy cavalry defeated Lowenhaupt's army unit by isolated unit and captured the vast majority of its trains (supplies). Even if Lowenhaupt had been able to link up with Charles, he would have been more of a burden than an asset. Lesnaya made the victory at Poltava possible.²⁷

Peter, on the other hand, spent the winter of 1708 in Voronezh re-equipping his Black Sea fleet and keeping the Turks pacified. He also used the time to introduce a light new artillery piece, one, which fired a three pound ball. This cannon was specifically designed for infantry support rather than siege work. Peter and his commanders used it to disrupt advancing enemy columns and to create holes in enemy defensive formations that his infantry could exploit.

The Russians started moving toward Poltava in mid-summer 1709. By June, Peter massed 40,000 troops and 75 guns near the fortress town. The Swedes had 30 guns, mostly unserviceable, and were low on powder and ammunition. Charles could muster only about 22,000 soldiers.

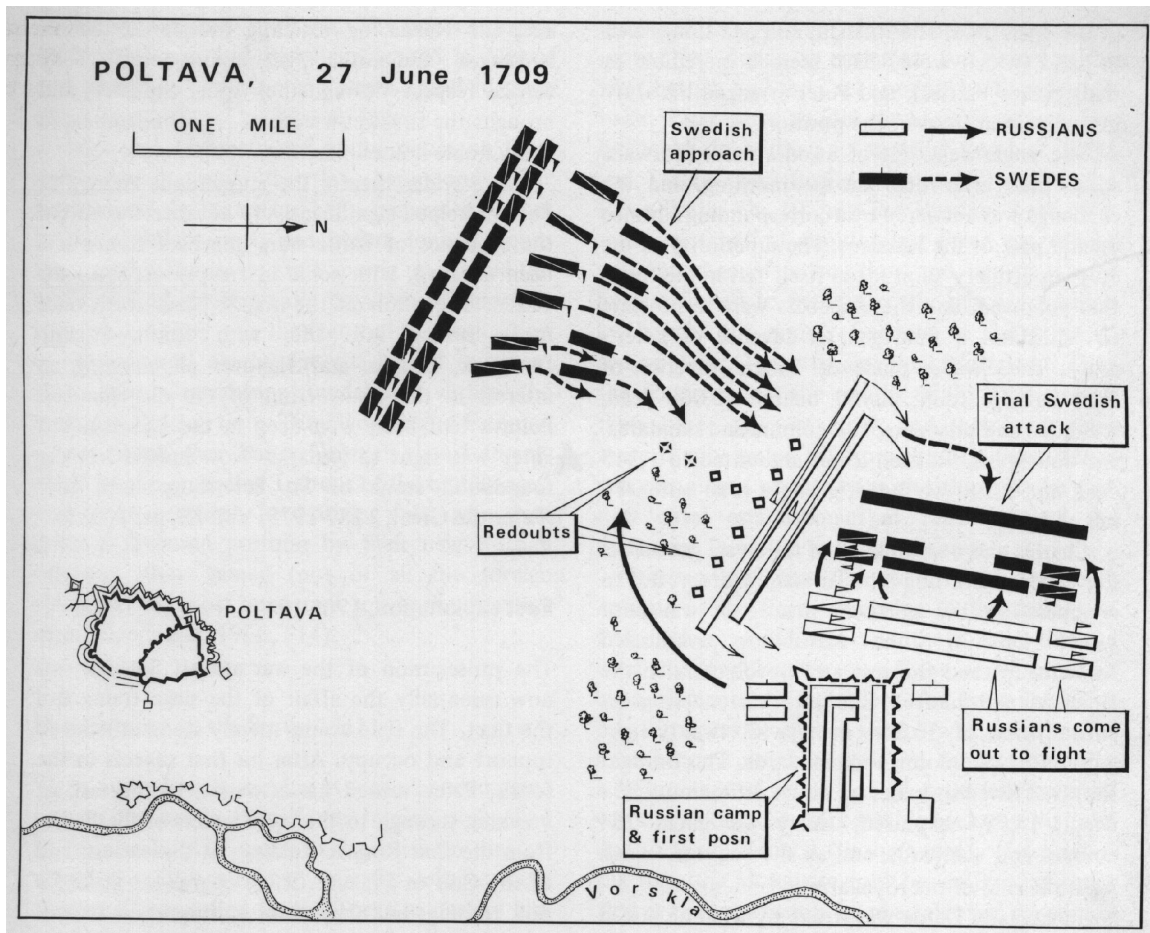


Figure 6. The Battle of Poltava

Peter sent advanced units to the southern side of the Vorskla River where they harassed Swedish scouts on the opposite bank. One of the scouts was Charles XII and a Russian sniper fired a shot that hit the king in the heel. Charles was not killed, but he was incapacitated to the point that Swedish Field Marshall Renhnskold took command of the army. Later that day, the Russians crossed the river enmasse and dug in. The

engineers constructed redoubts and obstacles meant to break up and channel any Swedish advance. Obstacles were also placed to allow counterattacks. Peter supervised the work and, for the first time, took direct command of the Russian army in a battle.

The action started at two in the morning when Russian dragoons detected Swedish movement. The majority of the Russian forces were dug-in in their camp behind redoubts. By 3:00 a.m., the first Swedish attack started and progressed to the Russian redoubts. Russian obstacles, artillery, and musketry took their toll on the Swedes who were forced to fall back and regroup. By 9:00 they were ready to try again. This time, the Russians began a disciplined movement from behind the redoubts into line for battle. Peter then launched dragoon raids into the Swede's flank that again disrupted and delayed their advance. Sensing the loss of his own momentum and the discipline of his enemy, Charles ordered a retreat to the Dnieper River. The withdrawal was disorganized and once the Swedes finally reached the river, they found their boats had been burned by a Russian *corps volant*. By the end of the day, 10,000 Swedes were dead compared to only 1345 Russians.

The campaign continued on 30 June when Menshikov again met Lowenhaupt, this time on the Dnieper. As at Lesnaya, the Russians prevailed and Lowenhaupt was forced to surrender 16,254 men and 28 guns. Peter took the town of Poltava on 8 July. On his way to Poltava, Menshikov captured Mazepa's artillery and stores, destroyed his capital at Baturin and thereby forced Ukraine into submission. The only unsuccessful aspect of the campaign was that both Charles and Mazepa escaped to the protection of Ottomans.²⁸

After Poltava, Russia was free of the threat of invasion from either the south or the west, all rebellious areas were subdued, and Peter was free to concentrate his forces

against the Swedes in Finland, Livonia, and Estonia. The victory set up other Baltic victories, which followed in 1710.

Within six months, the Northern Alliance was reconstituted and this time Brandenburg joined also. The Alliance helped Peter get Augustus II put back on the Polish throne. In June 1710, Russian forces captured Viborg — a fortress from which Swedish offensive operations were often launched. The next month, Russia reduced Riga and then quickly captured Estonia using combined sea and land actions. It is now that we see Peter's original foreign policy objective reemerge. Instead of giving Livonia to Augustus as he promised in 1700, he kept it for himself. Not only had the Tsar achieved unhindered access to the Baltic Sea; he exploited it by building a defensible buffer zone around Petersburg.

Poltava also showcased Peter's military reforms. He and his enlightened subordinates had forged a professional army and trained it to work as a single unit. His dragoons provided warning, his engineers constructed disruptive obstacles and protective redoubts, his infantry marched without breaking, his artillery fired true, and his cavalry counterattacked and raided when needed. Even senior Russian officers exhibited competence in employing their units, competence that now rivaled that of their fellow foreign-born regimental and brigade commanders.

Pruth

Unfortunately for Peter, the Ottoman Turks attacked before he could fully consolidate his gains in the north. The trouble began in 1710 when the Turks began attacking into Moldavia. Peter answered the challenge by moving part of his army south along the Pruth river. The two areas of the military that Peter had not had a chance to

reform, his logistics and his intelligence, played a large part in the defeat that was to follow.

As Peter was moving south, he began running low on provisions and was unable to successfully replenish his stocks from the areas through which he moved. Next, Peter formed a *corps volant*, but rather than give it a mission of finding and fixing the enemy, he sent it to raid the Turkish rear and burn their magazines on the Danube River. By the time they arrived, the Turks had already crossed the Danube in strength. This left Peter with his forces split and low on food and ammunition. He greatly underestimated the strength and speed of his opponent and miscalculated the level of support he could obtain from the local Christian citizens. The Turkish Grand Vizier managed to surround Peter's forces on 21 July 1711.²⁹

The Grand Vizier did not force Peter into full surrender. He only demanded the return of Azov and the lands lost to Russia in 1696, the evacuation of Poland, the abandonment of the Black Sea fleet, and a guarantee of safe passage for Charles XII back to Sweden.

The main conclusion to draw from Pruth is not that the reforms Peter made to this point failed. Peter's reconnaissance, logistics, and generalship were at fault, not his infantry, artillery, or dragoons. Even the best army is easily defeated if it is improperly deployed, informed, sustained and led. Peter simply miscalculated the situation and was unable to apply his strengths to the enemy's weaknesses.

Immediately after Pruth, Peter reoriented his forces north to continue the Great Northern War. Later in 1711, he arranged for a coalition offensive including the Danes and the Saxons against Sweden. But coalition warfare was not usually easy or successful.

The Danes were tasked to provide artillery support to prevent Swedish seaborne reinforcement of Stettin. Unfortunately for Peter, the support never materialized and Charles XII was able to land a sizable force that threatened Russian access to the Elba and other central European rivers.³⁰

The Stettin landing did not diminish Peter's military capability in the region. After losing the Black Sea Fleet at Pruth, Peter wisely did his best to protect his northern fleet, the hub of his military power in the Baltic Sea. He ordered his sailors to never engage Swedish ships unless victory with low losses was virtually assured. Following the Tsar's orders, the navy struck at easy targets, like Finnish ports, and continued to use the techniques they had perfected against the Swedes in the previous years.

Peter constructed a shipbuilding facility at Baltic port city of Revel where he turned out a large number of galleys. He increased the size of his fleet by purchasing several capital ships from England and Holland. Peter's naval construction, acquisitions and training paid off at Hango in July 1714. In this battle, Peter remained cautious, holding his top of the line ships in reserve while he committed his galleys to the fight. Superior Russian seamanship and tactics allowed the galleys to win the battle and destroy the Swedish fleet. The victory established Peter's naval superiority in the Baltic Sea and enabled him to occupy the whole of Finland.³¹

SUMMARY of MILITARY REFORMS

What Peter I was able to do during his reign, especially during the first ten years, is remarkable. As Duffy describes it, the Russian army of the middle seventeenth century was "a rag-bag of formations representing so many survivals from the past, borrowings from the West, and experiments and expedients, expressing a general principle of setting

the new alongside the old, without any attempt to transform the whole."³² Duffy goes on to characterize the army moving toward Crimea in 1687 as "marching in an unpaid and hungry mass." The force's morale was so low that when it finally did reach the battlefield, 300,000 Russian troops refused to fight a force of 15,000 Tartars.³³ Sumner has a similar view and comments that the pre-Petrine army as "ineffectual ... in prolonged operations or in an offensive campaign."³⁴

Duffy asserts that the noblemen and their armed serfs who made up the cavalry served because they were forced to or in order to gain status — they did not serve for the good of the country. Their horses were feeble and gun-shy. As late as 1650, they carried lances into battle and used bows and arrows and swords characterized as "inadequate for combat against the Tatars, and almost completely useless when faced with regular Western armies."³⁵ Sumner again echoes Duffy when he describes the feudal cavalry as a "hereditary-privileged force, recruited ... from townsfolk, partly engaged in trade and handicrafts, living apart in their own quarters, an incitable hotbed of superstition, pride, reaction, and religious dissent."³⁶ As far as Duffy, Moss, and Ragsdale were concerned, the only "reliable" troops of 1689 were the *Streletsy*. At best, their commitment to military life came in second to the pursuit of their peacetime enterprises.³⁷

Peter transformed the army he inherited in 1689 into 42 well-disciplined infantry regiments and 33 regiments of dragoons.³⁸ He also converted a virtually non-existent artillery force of a few siege guns into one that could support its infantry and cavalry with accurate and devastating fire.

Tsars had been bringing in foreigners to lead Russian units from as early as 1630. By the time Peter took charge, there were virtually no Russians in command. Peter

remedied this by instituting military schools, such as the Russian War College (opened in January 1720)³⁹ and by changing the way officers were promoted. Before Peter, officer promotion was based social rank and family status in the nobility. Peter imposed a meritocracy where a brave and skilled officer could rise through the ranks regardless of his family's social standing in the Tsar's Court. Officers would now be promoted on "first-hand knowledge, hard work, and sharing [the] toil [of their soldiers]."⁴⁰ As an example of this new system, Aleksandr Danilovich Menshikov was able to rise from a boy selling fish pies on a Moscow street corner to the rank of field marshal.⁴¹

Peter also changed the way officers were trained. He issued edicts in 1711, 1719, 1724 that required all officers to spend time in the ranks before they could wear officer insignia. Most future officers received their training in the Preobrazhenskii and Semenovskii regiments before they went to advanced military schooling. By the mid-1720s, these schools were turning out 200-400 Russian officers per year.⁴² Peter fielded a well-trained and professional Russian officer corps by the time of his death in 1725.

Peter also changed the way his officers trained their units. In 1689, regimental commanders trained and fought as they wished. By 1712 Peter began turning his Rules of Combat (1708) into a full military code (published in 1716).⁴³ Today, we would think of these works as standardized training manuals, service regulations, and a uniformed code of military justice.

Peter copied much from the West, but he did come up with a few of his own initiatives. One example was the already highlighted — the bayonet in the attack. Another innovation was the *corps volant* or "flying corps" which was a self-contained force of six or seven thousand mounted men detached from the main force and put at the

disposal of a general (often Menshikov). It could be given a mission to cut the enemy off, deprive him of a pass, raid his rear area, or make a diversion. In modern terms, the flying corps would be known as an economy of force unit, and its spirit lasted all the way to the strategic "deep strike" units of the Soviet and Russian Federation forces.⁴⁴

The army was not the only armed service Peter expanded. In 1694, the Russian Navy consisted of two Dutch-built frigates.⁴⁵ By 1725, the Baltic fleet alone had 50 large warships and over 800 other vessels. Peter also bolstered the navy's infrastructure by constructing several ports on the Baltic and Black Seas while also boosting the production of sails and guns at his newly established factories in the Ural Mountains.

Peter's reforms cost money. His military expenditures went from 750,000 rubles in 1680 to over 5,403,348 in 1724. His revenues grew from 1,500,000 rubles to 8,546,000 over the same period.⁴⁶ The only way he was able to finance this expansion was by dividing up the country into several regions, stationing a regiment in each, and instructing the soldiers to feed and pay themselves by collecting a "soul" tax⁴⁷ from all citizens of the region. For the navy, the Tsar forced Russians living near port cities to pay for the construction of his fleets.

All of these reforms would have been for naught, however, if Peter had not been able to fill his ships and regiments with the appropriate number of men. In 1681, 89,000 men were under arms. To increase this number, Peter asked for volunteers, but also demanded service from landowners and resorted to levies. The first levy went out in 1705 and required one man from every 20 peasant households.⁴⁸ During the decades of fighting, a total of fifty-three levies inducted more than 300,000 conscripts. By 1725, a muster of the Russian army alone would have netted over 300,000 soldiers.⁴⁹

Notes

¹ Sumner, 35.

² Moss, 229.

³ Ibid., 229.

⁴ Ibid., 229.

⁵ Duffy, 11.

⁶ Ibid., and Moss, 229.

⁷ Moss, 229.

⁸ Duffy, 12.

⁹ Ibid., 10.

¹⁰ This view is advanced most strongly by Sumner and is supported by Menning, Marshall, most authors in Ragsdale, and, to a lesser extent, Duffy.

¹¹ Marshall, 25-26.

¹² Duffy, 12.

¹³ Marshall, 26.

¹⁴ Sumner, 47.

¹⁵ Ragsdale, 24.

¹⁶ Sumner and Marshall, 26.

¹⁷ Robert Massie gives an excellent account of this battle in *Peter the Great: His Life and the World*. (New York: Knopf, 1980) and treats the Russian forces more gingerly than I have. But since he is the only source who considers the Russian actions anything more than a panicked route, I decided to describe the battle in this manner.

¹⁸ Duffy, 16-17.

¹⁹ Ibid., 17.

²⁰ Sumner, 56.

²¹ Duffy, 17.

²² Ibid., 6, 17.

²³ Menning, 5.

²⁴ Duffy, 23.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Sumner, 63.

²⁷ Menning 5-8.

²⁸ Sumner, 68.

²⁹ Ibid., 74.

³⁰ Ibid., 78.

³¹ LeDonne, 25.

³² Duffy, 6.

³³ Duffy, 7, quoting from I. T. Pososhkov, "O Rantom Povedenii," *Kniga o Skudosti I Bagatstvie I Drugie Sochineniya*. Moscow: 1951, 262. I was unable to find a reference indicating that the Russians could not find the Tatars.

³⁴ Sumner, 19.

³⁵ Duffy, 6.

³⁶ Sumner, 19. Although I only use Duffy and Sumner in this section, this view of the pre-Petrine army is held by all sources, although not so strongly by Massie. The point about Russia's expansion with a pre-Petrine army is well taken. But the crux of my

Notes

analysis, and I believe that of the sources, is to indicate that as opposed to a European land or naval force of 1686, Russian forces were completely outmatched.. Pre-Petrine success came against Turk and Tatar forces on the Steppe which Menning refers to as "superb individual fighters" who traveled light and massed quickly, but who could not outlast any force who had superior firepower (which a musket was) or staying power (which the Russians had because they operated from fortresses in garrison and phalanxes in the field). A square of pikemen can hold their own against a few light cavalry, but it is no match for a combined assault from artillery, heavy cavalry, and flint-lock equipped infantry.

³⁷ Duffy, 6-7.

³⁸ Menning, 5.

³⁹ Duffy, 34.

⁴⁰ Sumner, 33.

⁴¹ Duffy, 32. It is true that seniority played a role in determining advancement. But as Menshikov shows, allowances were made to promote the very best officers more quickly than others. I could also find no reference that indicated seniority was the only determinate of advancement. It seems to me that a combination of merit and seniority propelled officers upward through the ranks.

⁴² Marshall, 28.

⁴³ Duffy, 29.

⁴⁴ Menning, 5-9.

⁴⁵ RSI 51.

⁴⁶ Duffy, 36.

⁴⁷ This was a tax levied on each living "soul" or person in a residence. A family of four would have to pay four installments, regardless of the ages of the people.

⁴⁸ Sumner

⁴⁹ Moss, 234-35.

Chapter 4

CONCLUSION

Peter the Great was an extraordinary leader. His life was characterized by war, reform, turmoil, intrigue, defeat, and triumph. Through all of this, Peter remained focused on the goal he established in the first years of his reign; making Russia the master of the trade route between central Asia and central Europe. To achieve this goal, Peter had to gain control of the Baltic Sea and the ports on the Elbe River, prevent interference from the Tatars, keep the Ottoman Turks in check, and gain control of the Western Caspian.

The Tsar used a multi-faceted strategy to realize his grand plan. Peter fought at Azov and negotiated a treaty with the Turks to gain free navigation rights on the Black Sea and pacify the areas to its north and east. He married his nieces to the Prussian gentry to secure access to the southwestern Baltic and Denmark Sound. He formed an alliance against Sweden and then fought a protracted war against it to win control of the eastern Baltic. Finally, he forged an alliance with the Georgian tsar against the Persian shah and later signed a treaty with the Turks to secure the western Caspian coast, the silk producing regions to its north, and a route to India.

When Peter had to use force, he did. But he did not fight unless it was to further his strategic objectives. All his campaigns were directly related to securing strategic areas,

which expanded his influence over the trade routes. He understood that his military was a valuable tool and was determined not to squander it. Quite the opposite, he went to great lengths to improve his armed forces and make them the best they could be. In the end, Peter combined a consistent focus with diplomatic and martial tools to achieve his objectives. By 1724, Russia controlled the trade routes from India to Mecklenburg and beyond.

Appendix A

Timeline

1558-81	Ivan the Terrible's Baltic campaign.
<u>1613-1645</u>	Reign of Tsar Mikhail Romanov.
1617	Treaty of Stolbovo with Sweden.
1618	Armistice of Deulino with Poland.
1632-1634	Smolensk War with Poland.
<u>1645-1676</u>	Reign of Tsar Alexei.
1652	Tsar Alexei requires foreigners in Moscow to reside in the Foreign Suburb.
1654-1667	Thirteen Years' War between Russia and Poland; by Peace of Andrusovo (1667) Poland loses Left Bank, Ukraine, Kiev, and Smolensk to Russia.
1656-1661	Russo-Swedish War.
<u>1676-1682</u>	Reign of Tsar Fedor III.
<u>1676-1681</u>	Russo-Turkish War (Waged by Alexei against Ottomans for control of Black Sea).
1682	First <i>Streltsy</i> rebellion
<u>1682-1689</u>	Regency of Sophia, with Peter I and Ivan V as co-tsars.
1686	Russo-Polish "Eternal Peace" signed.
1687	First campaign against Crimean Tatars.
1689	Second campaign against Crimean Tatars. Peter I overthrows Sophia.
<u>1689-1725</u>	Reign of Peter I, the Great (rules alone after the death of Ivan V in 1696).
1694	War game between Peter's Guards regiments and <i>Streltsy</i> .
1695	Russia reengages in Black Sea against Ottoman Turks.
1695	First battle of Azov (5 August – Peter's first action, Russia defeated).
1696	Second Battle of Azov (July); Russians capture port city and later construct shipbuilding facilities at Taganrog.
1697-1698	Peter I visits Western Europe (the Grand Tour).
1698	Second <i>Streltsy</i> revolt fails; Peter I executes leading rebels.
1699	Peace of Karlowitz (Disbanded Holy League of Russia, Austria, Venice and Poland and ended war against Turkey for all but Moscow).
1699	Peter issues two calls for volunteers to fill the ranks(8 Nov, 17 Nov).
1699	By December, Russian Navy consists of 14 warships and one 46-gun frigate.
1699	Treaty of Constantinople (Extricates Russia from Black Sea commitments while ensures continued control of Azov).

<u>1700–1721</u>	Great Northern War with Sweden.
1701	Battle of Narva (19 Nov)
1701	By December, Peter has 243 cannons, 13 howitzers, and 12 mortars in his arsenal.
1701–1704	Small operations near Lake Lagoda.
1702	Peter issues proclamation to attract foreign officers.
1703	St. Petersburg founded
1705	Russian Army consists of 200,000 soldiers; Peter reconfigures regiments.
1705–1711	Peter I's policies spark rebellions in Astrakhan, the Don area and Bashkiria.
1707	Revolts in Taganrog and Azov.
1708	Battle of Holovzen (3 July).
1708	Battle of Lesnaya (9 Oct).
1709	Battle of Poltava (defeats Charles XII and Hetman Mazepa).
1710	Peter grants Livonia and Estonia freedom of religion and limited self rule.
1710	Marriage of Peter's niece, Anna Ivanovna, to Duke Fredrick William of Courland (Consolidates territorial gains in Baltics through dowry).
1710–1711	War with Turkey.
1710	Additional Baltic victories, Viborg captured.
1711	Battle of Pruth (July 21).
1714	Artemii Volynsky sent to Persia for trade negotiations.
1715	Naval engagement at Hango (July)
1716	Marriage of Peter's niece, Catherine Ivanovna, to Duke Charles Leopold of Mecklenberg and deployment of troops to Mecklenberg (Gained right to use Baltic ports in return for promise to help defend the Duke if Sweden attacked him).
1716–1717	Peter I's second trip to Western Europe.
1717	Trade agreement with Persia
1720	Shemakha of Persia attacks killing 300 Russian merchants
1721	Marriage of Peter's daughter, Anna Petrovna, to Charles Fredrick of Holstein (Linked Peter to royal family of Sweden, made Charles successor to Swedish throne in 1723).
1721	Treaty of Nystadt (Concludes the Great Northern War).
1721	Peter I adopts the title of Emperor; Holy Synod founded.
1722	Peter I establishes Table of Ranks.
<u>1722–1723</u>	War against Persia
1723	Treaty of Tahmasp, (September) cedes Baku and Derbent to Russia (Peter gains Caspian territories).
1724	Russo-Ottoman treaty (June) solidifies partition of Persian empire, Peter retains gains on Caspian coast.
1725	Peter I dies.
<u>1725–1727</u>	Rule of Catherine I.

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